

Springfield Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership

Springfield, Massachusetts



Designated in September 2015, the Springfield Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership has joined the Service's network of partners working to engage urban residents as partners in wildlife conservation. Springfield, Massachusetts has a well-established network of organizations engaged in community well-being and environmental sustainability. Partners such as ReGreen Springfield, the Springfield Science Museum, the U.S. Forest Service, and multiple local and regional partners will work with the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge to help the city's residents make stronger connections to the outdoors, bring the health benefits of outdoor recreation to Springfield neighborhoods, achieve the purposes of Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, and advance the goals of the Service's urban conservation program.

The partnership envisions a linear approach to engaging youth that fosters an ever closer connection to the natural world and matches an individual's level of interest over time: exposing elementary age children to environmental programming, offering more in-depth intermediate experiences through summer camps and the Youth Conservation Corps, developing mentoring relationships with individuals



Springfield student learning to handle a Harris hawk.

contemplating natural resource careers, and offering internship opportunities within the larger network of natural resource professionals. More broadly, the partnership will offer enhanced access to a restored greenspace as a place to observe nature and a quiet space for reflection apart from the bustle of city life.

The work of the partnership currently involves urban stream and forest restoration at the Abbey Brook Conservation Area as an urban greenway, programming at the Renaissance School that applies stream monitoring, invasive species management, wetland restoration concepts at Abbey Brook and youth employment opportunities with the Service's Youth Conservation Corps.

Efforts seek to restore forested uplands and stream bed stability along Abbey Brook. This will support improved habitat for migratory forest-dependent songbirds and will enhance stream bed resiliency and water quality to support native aquatic life. The health of songbirds and native aquatic species, as well as the overall Connecticut River watershed, are threatened by diminished water quality in Abbey Brook. Erosion and excessive urban stormwater inputs that carry road grit, salt, nutrients,

increased thermal loads, and petroleum products have contributed to the decreased water quality in Abbey Brook, creating an inhospitable environment for most aquatic life.

Among its positive attributes, Abbey Brook borders several schools, providing a chance for unique environmental education opportunities – among them the Renaissance School, a key project partner whose students have already been using Abbey Brook for class assignments.

Proposed restoration projects include a well-designed trail network that is more welcoming and accessible while minimizing environmental degradation.

The Springfield Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership has received about \$235,000 toward its work from a combination of grants leveraged from Service funds and matching dollars from partners. In January of 2016, the city of Springfield was announced as a winner of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC); Springfield received over \$17 million to support its efforts to build resiliency to the impacts of climate change and increase public engagement in conservation activities.



Volunteers helping with environmental outreach to urban youth.

